

# Team-Building 101: How You Can Create & Maintain Cohesive Teams

*Clint Maun, CSP*

To remain successful, healthcare organizations must rely on the concept of teamwork. From administration, to nursing, to physicians, to janitorial services - to get the job done, everyone must do their part. While some employees may immediately embrace this concept, it's inevitable that some will shy away. No matter what the case is at your organization, as a manager, it is your duty to create as well as maintain a friendly team environment.

## **How Do I Start?**

Creating cohesive teams at your organization may seem like a daunting task, but there are actually plenty of ways to achieve this. And the best part? You can have fun while doing it!

Building strong, unified teams can be as simple as a group lunch, or as detailed as an entire day filled with activities and prizes. The main idea is to bring your people together so they can bond and learn more about one another. While many team-building activities involve spending company time and money, the end results are usually worth their weight in gold. Your organization can reap many benefits including boosted morale, strong friendships between co-workers, and increased appreciation for the company - all of which contribute to a happy, productive workplace.

How much time and effort one can devote to team-building is going to vary from healthcare organization to healthcare organization. However, as mentioned above, these endeavors benefit not just the employees, but the organization as a whole. So, keep this in mind when you're planning and presenting your team-building ideas to senior management.

The sky is virtually the limit when it comes to team-building activities; but if you're having trouble thinking of things to do, take note of these ideas:

**Get outdoors.** Allow employees to get out of the office and enjoy some fresh air by playing games like cricket, flag football, relay races, volleyball, etc. Not only are these fun activities, but they also demonstrate the importance of team dynamics. Make sure you mix up the teams a bit - have employees who don't work with each other on a regular basis on the same team.

**Delegate.** Looking for a plethora of ideas? Hand the responsibility on to your co-workers! Determine how often you want to hold team activities (i.e., once a month, once every two months, etc.) and then assign one employee to organize that activity. Perhaps they have a unique game, puzzle, and/or movie to share with the rest of the group. Allowing each employee to organize a team event will help bring variety and creativity to the events. In addition, it allows each individual to share their hobbies and interests with everyone else.

**Recognize and celebrate.** Recognizing co-workers by honoring birthdays, work anniversaries, or the completion of a complicated project bolsters the team and facilitates team-building. This doesn't mean that you must do all the planning or pay for all the supplies. For example, for birthdays, you can set up a schedule in which the person who had the last birthday must be responsible for buying a cake, getting a card, etc. for the next co-worker's birthday. This way, everyone equally contributes, and the question of who will get the celebration supplies is automatically answered.

**Start a tradition.** Traditions create a sense of foundation and allegiance. Perhaps your department welcomes newcomers by making them wear a distinctive name tag or pin. Maybe there's a trinket or plaque someone must keep with them if they're the newest member of the team. No matter what your tradition entails, it will help create a sense of acceptance and camaraderie. It can be something you take very seriously, or it can be fun and silly. It's ultimately up to you.

**Applying themes to your team-building activities.** Team-building can include a wide variety of methodologies and themes. To become a great team-builder, you should get acquainted with as many methodologies and related themes as you can.

Here are some themes that can be useful in your team-building activities:

- **Sports psychology** contains useful and relevant elements that can be carried over to the healthcare profession. Think about it - every sports team needs to put aside their differences and work together to be successful. Using a sports theme is a great way to powerfully convey your message.
- **Outdoor survival** and challenges are unique experiences and themes that help co-workers more keenly recognize their surroundings. Working together, in harmony with nature, helps demonstrate how team members can achieve their goals in spite of uncontrollable factors (i.e., Mother Nature).
- **Military tactics** – The military (Army, Navy, etc.) are all extremely focused on team effort. Just like the healthcare profession, these organizations count on one another to preserve and protect the lives of others.

**Revert to your childhood.** What kinds of games and activities did you enjoy as a child? If you have children, ask them what games they like the most. Board games, tricks, puzzles, and other elementary activities can offer a nice break from the hectic world of work. Reverting to such activities can also allow employees to laugh, have a good time and explore a more creative side that otherwise may stay dormant.

**Recruit outsiders.** Bring in a fun, motivational speaker to both entertain and educate employees about ways to enliven the workplace.

Remember, imagination is key. Take these ideas and put your own touch to them. Tailor your activities around the personalities and preferences of your team.

### Details to Remember

When planning team-building activities, there'll be a variety of items that will have a significant impact on how smoothly an activity goes. When planning for a team-building activity, think about these factors:

- **Team mix** - You want to create teams that are diverse in every aspect (age, job type, department, gender, seniority, etc.) so people who don't normally interact can have a chance to do so. You'll also want to take extra care when organizing team-building activities and games for the older people in your group. Will the activity demand too much physical activity for them? Is there a chance they can get injured? If so, you may want to think of a more relaxed activity.
- **Team numbers** - Pairs or small teams will allow for high interaction and involvement. However, if you have a large team (five or more) you'll need to elect or have the team name a leader. Without a leader, there's a higher chance of non-participation and chaos, so avoid this (unless the purpose of the exercise is to demonstrate why teams need leadership).
- **Team roles** - Will you need a timekeeper? A note-taker? A presenter? Take time beforehand to consider all roles that are necessary to carry out the activity and make sure you'll have enough people to fulfill those roles.
- **Directions** - Make sure all team-building game instructions are clear and complete. This is essential for keeping control and credibility. Practice the team-building exercise yourself first to check that it works and to ensure you have all the answers to possible questions and confusions.
- **Duration** - Determine beforehand how much time should be spent on the activity. You want to allow enough time for everyone to fully participate, but you don't want the event to drag on.
- **Prizes** - Awarding a trophy or gift certificate to the winner(s) of the team activity can spark more interest and fuel competition.
- **Venue and logistics** - Do you need to reserve space for the activity? Put down a deposit? Is the room big enough? Can food be catered in? Will you need a microphone so people can hear you? You need to consider all logistics well in advance.
- **Materials** - Always have spare materials and equipment to allow for more people, breakages and the inevitable requests for freebies ("Oh, these are so neat, can I take one home with me?").

While organizing team-building activities can involve a lot of work, just remember that it will pay off in the end. In the meantime, you should take pleasure in the fact that you're providing your employees with such wonderful opportunities.